

African Reactions to the US Rescue Mission in Iran (U)

Official African comment on the rescue mission has been sparse. Most reaction has taken the form of government-planted stories in the local press or quiet asides to US diplomats. Most African governments previously have expressed their irritation with Iran for taking hostages and sympathize with what they view as an American attempt to avoid loss of life on both sides. Secretary Vance's resignation has elicited no official reactions. (C)

The Rescue Mission

With the single exception of Ethiopia, those Africans that have reacted have expressed sympathy for the aims of the mission and the families of the deceased. Officials from Lesotho, Ghana, Tanzania, and Djibouti have quietly noted their regret that the operation did not end the crisis. Djibouti President Gouled condemned the Iranian Government's actions as "un-Islamic" and quickly augmented security at the US Embassy compound. The Cameroonian press hailed President Carter's restraint in the face of Iran's "tacit declaration of war." (S)

In an article with official blessing, South Africa's Die Burger suggested that the unfortunate outcome of the mission might unite Americans against not only the Iranians but the Soviet Union as well. (C)

The lone sour note was sounded by Ethiopian Chairman Mengistu Haile-Mariam, who characterized the operation as "armed aggression against the peoples of Iran . . . and the world" by the "policeman of the world" who is attempting to destabilize the area. After a protest by the US Ambassador, Ethiopia's Foreign Ministry and official newspaper reiterated this stand. Ethiopia, which has become strongly anti-American in recent years, appears to be using the event as a low-cost opportunity to repair relations with Tehran, which has publicly supported insurgents in northern Eritrea Province and rebuffed Addis's past calls for high-level talks. (C)

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No official or nongovernmental African initiatives are expected regarding the mission, which is generally viewed as a US-Iranian dispute. The UN General Assembly is not in session and will not be mustered to debate the issue. Iranian President Bani-Sadr's reported proposal for action by the nonaligned movement is likely to fail--Tehran has not followed through with its announcement of oil price rebates for less developed countries. Anti-American demonstrations larger than the peaceful protest in Nigeria or terrorist actions by Africans are highly unlikely. (C)

Implications of the Vance Resignation

The resignation of Secretary Vance and the earlier resignation of Ambassador Young remove the two principal architects of a policy that won many friends in black Africa by distancing the United States from white minority regimes. Several observers--including a prominent South African academic who frequently speaks with Pretoria's backing--believed that the United States would now give greater attention to the East-West conflict, including stiffening its opposition to Soviet-leaning African regimes. (U)

Secretary-designate Muskie was well received in Nigeria in 1971 at a meeting of the African-American Institute attended by two dozen prominent Africans, among them ambassadors and Cabinet ministers. At that time he called for a reassessment of US relations with--or even boycott of--South Africa and the Portuguese territories. This continuity in administration views is likely to be hailed by most Africans, while Pretoria will probably adopt a wait-and-see attitude. (C) (SECRET)

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